A

SERMON

Preach'd before the Honourable

Company of MERCHANTS

Trading to the

Levant-Seas.

AT

St. *PETER-POOR*, Dec. 15. 1695.

By HENRY MAUNDRELL, A. M.
Fellow of *Exeter*-College in *Oxford*: And
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To the Right Honourable

George Earl of Berkeley,

GOVERNOR,

AND TO THE

Honourable Company of MERCHANTS Trading to the *Levant-Seas.*

Right Honourable, &c.

THIS Diſcourſe, *at firſt* Preach'd *by your* Appointment, *is now* Preſented *to you in a more publick manner, in* Obedience *to your Commands. The Defects of it, I acknowledge to be ſuch, as render it very unworthy of the Patronage to which it is Dedicated; but how little ſoever it* deſerves *your Protection, yet it has one Argument to plead for it ſelf, That it* needs *it: An Argument, which, as it ſeldom fails to obtain your Favour, ſo I hope now it will the rather prevail, becauſe it is in Submiſſion to your Order, that it is brought under* that neceſſity: *For tho the* blame

of its faults *be imputable only to its* Author, *yet the* Publication *of it is* wholly yours. *I am too ſenſible, how ill I have, in this mean Performance, anſwer'd the Character given of me, to your* Honourable Company, *by ſome Worthy Members of it, my Incomparable Friends: Perſons of ſuch Improved Knowledge and Exquiſite Judgment, that it may perhaps be wonder'd how they ſhould come to be ſo miſtaken; but you will be the leſs ſurprized, when you conſider, That it was a miſtake ariſing from* thoſe Virtues in them, *which are ſo Illuſtrious in your* whole Society, Friendſhip *and* Generoſity. *However, this Advantage I ſhall make of their* kind Error, *to uſe it as an Admonition, what ſort of Perſon he ought to be, and how well qualified, who ſhould pretend to the honour of being your* Chaplain. *And thus far I hope I may aſſure you, That, what I want in Learning or Abilities, I will endeavour, by the Grace of God, to make up and ſupply, by Diligence, and Probity, and Zeal, for the Service of God, and of your* Honourable Society, *in this Important Station, in which your great Goodneſs has placed me.* I am,

MY LORD,
and
GENTLEMEN,

Your moſt Obedient, and
moſt Faithful Humble Servant,

HENRY MAUNDRELL.

A

SERMON

Preach'd before the

Levant-Company.

ECCLES. Chap. VII. Verſ. 16, 17.

Be not Righteous Over-much, neither make thy ſelf Over-wiſe: Why ſhouldeſt thou deſtroy thy ſelf?

Be not Over-much Wicked, neither be thou Fooliſh: Why ſhouldeſt thou dye before thy Time?

THESE words are the Counſel of the All-wiſe God; deliver'd alſo to us by the Wiſeſt of Men, King *Solomon*. And 'tis well they come ſo Recommended, ſince they may be thought to ſtand in need of ſo great an Authority to defend them from thoſe

Objections which every Man's Reaſon, at firſt hearing, is apt to ſuggeſt againſt them.

Be not Righteous Over-much, neither make thy ſelf Over-wiſe: Is this like the uſual Stile and Language of Inſpiration? Can thoſe *Lively Oracles* of God's Word, whoſe whole aim it is to advance us to the higheſt Degrees of *Righteouſneſs and Wiſdom* that our Nature is capable of, ſo far contradict their own deſign, as to bid us not be *Over-wiſe, or Over-righteous*? Can thoſe *Sacred Writings*, which in other places command us to be *holy, even as he that hath called us is holy; Perfect, as our father which is in heaven is perfect*, Here interpoſe a Caution againſt *Over-much Perfection*? Or can there be any danger of our ever being *Over-righteous*, the only Rule and Meaſure of whoſe Righteouſneſs is to be taken from the Infinite Purity of God himſelf? Where may a man be bold, to exert his moſt Vigorous and Unconfined endeavour, without all danger of running into any exceſs, if not in his attempts after theſe excellent Endowments, *Wiſdom*, and *Righteouſneſs*?

Or admitting it were poſſible in the Nature of the thing, that men could ever be *Over-wiſe, or Over-righteous*; yet where is the Neceſſity of their being caution'd againſt theſe Extremes? Are they ſo Intemperate in their Applications to

Wiſdom

Wiſdom and *Righteouſneſs*, that they need a Bridle to check their too Swift and Aſpiring Zeal? Do they bring in the Offerings of Righteouſneſs in ſo vaſt a ſtore, as the *Jews* did, of old, their Contributions for the Service of the Tabernacle, That it is requiſite there ſhould be a reſtraint laid upon their too profuſe Liberality? Happy certainly were thoſe Golden days of *Solomon*, if *Wiſdom* and *Righteouſneſs* ſo abounded! And have we not now reaſon to cry out, Oh! that men would but be *Wiſe*, and *Righteous* enough, rather than to uſe this caution of *Solomon*, *Be not Righteous Over-much, neither make thy ſelf Over-wiſe.* Exod. 36.

Again, *Be not Over-much Wicked*; Is this alſo a command becoming the Purity of the Word of God? Does the Divine Law allow us to be *Wicked* in a leſſer Degree, provided we are not *Over much* ſo? Is *Wickedneſs* ſo harmleſs a thing in its own nature, that, like Wine, it is forbid, not in the uſe, but only in the exceſs of it? Or is there any meaſure of Sin that is but enough, ſeeing all that we are here forbid, is no more but only this, ----- *Be not Wicked Over-much*?

Theſe are Exceptions, that are apt naturally to ariſe in men's Minds, againſt the words that now lie before us; for what Degree of *Righteouſneſs or Wiſdom* can be ſo great, that it may be *condemn'd*

as *Over-much*; or what Degree of *Wickedneſs* ſo *little*, that it may be *acquitted* as *not ſo*?

It will be neceſſary for me therefore, before I proſecute my Diſcourſe any further, to inſiſt a little upon the Vindication of my Text; and to explain it in ſuch a ſenſe, as may not be liable to theſe Objections, but more agreeable to the Holineſs and Dignity of the Word of God, whereof this is a part.

Tho, I do acknowledge, ſome Orthodox Commentators have interpreted theſe words only in a *Moral* ſenſe; and have ſo underſtood them, that hereby, the *higheſt true Degrees* of *Righteouſs*, *and Wiſdom*, cannot be in the leaſt condemned; but only the *unreaſonable Affectations, and arrogant Oſtentations of both*, and a cenſorious Pride, and rigid ſeverity toward other men, ariſing from a Preſumption of our excelling others in them: Yet, becauſe I find divers other ſound Interpreters have explain'd my *Text* in a larger, and more *Spiritual* ſenſe, with reference to the principal Duties of our holy *Religion*, I think it more proper for my preſent buſineſs, in this Religious Aſſembly, to conſider *it* chiefly according to this latter Interpretation.

In order to which, be pleaſed to obſerve, That theſe words *Righteouſneſs and Wiſdom*, are very frequently uſed in Scripture, to denote, not only thoſe

thoſe *particular Virtues*, but the intire body of Religion, with reſpect both to the *Knowledge* and *Practice* of it. According to which ſenſe, he is a *Righteous* man who exerciſes a *becomming Zeal* in the whole practice of Religion; and he a *Wiſe man*, who is well inſtructed in its Principles and Myſteries.

But now, if this be the meaning of theſe words here in my Text, how can the *Preacher's* prohibition be juſtify'd? How is it poſſible for any one to be too *Zealous* in the *Practice of Religion*; or too ſtudious to make himſelf Wiſe and Knowing in the Principles of it?

I anſwer, That it is *true* indeed, the *Knowledge* and *Practice* of Religion, are things of Infinite and Eternal Importance to us; and do therefore both require and deſerve to be made the Subjects of our moſt vigorous Zeal and Application. But it is no leſs *true* alſo, that there are certain Exceſſes and Irregularities, which men are prone to fall into, even in theſe moſt weighty concernments; upon account of which, they may be cenſured, as *Over-wiſe*, and *Over-righteous*.

For 'tis a Maxim well known and approved amongſt the Moraliſts, That Virtue conſiſts in a Mean, or Mediocrity, between two extremes; and the holy Scripture ſuggeſts to us the ſame inſtruction,

inſtruction, when it recommends to us, amongſt its other Precepts, the Duty of *Moderation*, as a kind of Regulation, and Government, to be appli'd to all the other Offices of Virtue and Religion; which rule of Moderation, holds good in reference even to theſe moſt precious Qualifications of *Wiſdom* and *Righteouſneſs*; There is a certain *Meaſure* and *Government* to be obſerv'd in our practice of them, without which, our very *Wiſdom* will become *abſurd*, and our *Righteouſneſs impious*. According to that juſt cenſure of the Poet,

Hor. lib. 1. Ep. 6.

Inſani ſapiens Nomen ferat, æquus iniqui,
Ultra, quàm ſatis eſt, Virtutem ſi petat ipſam.

For the illuſtration of which Principle in *Morals*, we may borrow a reſemblance from *Natural* things. Our food, we know, if moderately taken, is the nouriſher and ſuſtainer of our Life; but if uſed unſeaſonably, exceſſively, irregularly, it turns to our *Diſeaſe* inſtead of our *Refreſhment*: Phyſick, when skilfully appli'd, relieves the pains of the languiſhing Patient, and repairs the decays of his ruinous Tabernacle; but when uſed, without due Meaſure, Art, and Regimen, it *takes part* with the Diſeaſe, which it was deſign'd to *cure*, and under the pretences of a *Remedy*, proves to be a *Poiſon*. The natural heat of the Body, when it is

is temperate and even, and actuates the Blood with a regular *Circulation*, is Health, and Vigor, and Life: But the ſame Heat when it becomes feaveriſh, and raging, deſtroys that Body which before it animated, and the Patient dies with the Exceſs of his very *Vital Flame*.

Thus in like manner, *Righteouſneſs and Wiſdom* are the *Food* of the hungry Soul, the *Phyſick* of the Sick, and the ſpiritual *Heat* and *Life* of the Mind. But then alſo, if in relation to thoſe ſo neceſſary Perfections, we exceed the bounds of Sobriety and Moderation, that *Food* oppreſſes, that *Phyſick* poyſons, that *Heat* inflames and enrages our Souls. Without that neceſſary mixture of Moderation, our *Righteouſneſs* degenerates into a *Furious Zeal*, *Superſtition*, and *Bigotry*; and our *Wiſdom* into *Prophaneneſs*, Preſumption, and undue Curioſity.

Now to reſtrain us from all theſe and the like exceſſes, is the principal part of the Wiſe-man's Prohibition in the former Verſe of my Text, *Be not* Righteous *over-much, neither make thy ſelf over-wiſe*.

The other Branch of the *Prohibition* is, *Be not* over-much wicked, *neither be thou* fooliſh: Which Words are not to be ſo underſtood, as if they *forbad* only the *higher degrees of wickedneſs*, and yielded an indulgence to ſins of a leſſer ſize: For there can be no inſtance of Vice ſo inconſiderable either

in

in its *Meaſure* or its *Quality*, as to find any toleration allow'd for it in the Law of God. But the being over-much wicked, relates to the *duration* of Sin, and not to the *degree* of it; and forbids a long perſiſtency and hardneſs in Wickedneſs, and not only the more heinous and exorbitant acts of Impiety. This Expoſition is ſufficiently warranted by the *Septuagint* Tranſlation of this place; in which the Word here render'd *Fooliſh*, is σκληρὸς, and properly ſignifies Hard and Obſtinate; according to which Interpretation we may beſt underſtand the Words of the *Wiſe-man*, when he bids not to be over-much *wicked*, neither to be *fooliſh*.

From this account which has been given of the Text, we may now perceive that it contains in it, no ſuch ſtrange and unwarrantable meaning, as we were apt in our firſt thoughts to imagine; Since it appears, that the Prohibition here brought againſt over-much *Righteouſneſs* and *Wiſdom*, tends not to diſcourage us from applying our ſelves vigorouſly and faithfully to thoſe great and important Endowments; but only to reſtrain us from thoſe Exceſſes and Irregularities which we are apt to run into in ſuch applications: Nor is the Precept againſt *over-much Wickedneſs* intended to inſinuate any ſuch favourable opinion of Vice, as if the lower degrees of it were harmleſs and allowable, but rather to deter men from a long obduratenels and obſtinacy in ſin.

I ſhall

I ſhall obſerve therefore in the Text, a Caution given by the Wiſe-man againſt Three dangerous Exceſſes; The *two former* incident to the *Good* and *Religious* man; the *Laſt* to the *Wicked* and *Irreligious*.

The *Good Man*, *Solomon* cautions,

1*ſt*. Not to let his Zeal for *Religion* be immoderate and furious; *Be not righteous over-much*.

2*dly*. Not to let his Enquiries into the Myſteries of *Religion* be too curious and preſumptuous; *Neither make thy ſelf over-wiſe*.

Both which Cautions *He* backs with this Conſideration, *Why ſhouldſt thou deſtroy thy ſelf?*

The *Wicked Man*, *He* warns againſt a long and *obdurate Perſiſtency* in Sin; *Be not* over-much *wicked*, *neither be thou fooliſh*: Which warning *He* enforces by this Argument, *Why ſhouldſt thou dye before thy time?*

Theſe Three Cautions I take to be the principal and moſt uſeful matters contained in the Text; And to illuſtrate them very briefly, and enforce them by the Arguments annex'd to them will be as much as I ſhall be able to diſpatch, in the Time that is allow'd for my following Diſcourſe.

I begin with the firſt of theſe Cautions, *viz* Let not thy *Zeal* for Religion be *Immoderate* and *Furious*. Which is the Counſel implied in theſe Words, *Be not* Righteous over-much.

This is Advice very ſeaſonable to all men, and at all times; it being an univerſal Error, too often in ſome meaſure viſible in every Society and Party of men, to be tranſported into an *Exceſſive Zeal*, for the Patronage and Promotion of their own Perſuaſions. Whatever Religion men have been train'd up in, 'tis *natural* for them to be fond of it afterwards; That fondneſs will as *naturally* incline them to wiſh well to it; That kind Wiſh, to a *Zeal* and *Endeavour* for its *Increaſe* and *Propagation*. And it muſt be acknowledg'd, that this *Zeal*, ſo long as it contains it ſelf within the bounds of *Sobriety* and *Moderation*, is ſo far from being culpable, that it is a Charitable and Generous Diſpoſition. And indeed, *Religion* is ſo near a Concern, and ſo engaging, that 'tis impoſſible for a man, who really has *any*, to be indifferent towards it, or not affected for its Honour and Advancement.

But from hence reſults the Exceſs which men are led into in this point: They are not contented to be *ſoberly* and *temperately zealous*, and to promote their Religion by ſuch Rules and Meaſures as that *Religion* it ſelf preſcribes to them; but they run mad with an Exceſs of *Zeal* and *Bigotry* for it. Their Cauſe, they are confident, is the only *righteous* one; and then conclude, that they can never be *over-righteous*, in the promotion of it. All other Perſuaſions are very *Dagons* to them, and muſt fall down

down at the feet of their Ark. All the Engines of Fury and Perſecution muſt be ſet on foot, for the ſervice of ſo meritorious a Cauſe; And ſuch Miſchiefs and Barbarities muſt be executed for its ſake, as are a Reproach not only to *Religion*, but even to *Humanity* it ſelf.

Theſe are effects of an inordinate Zeal, which have been more or leſs evidenced in all Parties of men, and in all Religions. For indeed the very *Chriſtian Religion*, that Mild and Peaceable Inſtitution, has not eſcaped theſe flames of a mad and outragious Zeal. But on the contrary, that bleſſed *Inſtructer* of *Gentleneſs* and *Love*, has been, by the abuſe of its Profeſſors, perverted into an *Incentive* of the fierceſt *Cruelty* and *Perſecution*. The Prince of Peace has been made a Herald of Contention; and too many, that pretend to be of Chriſt's *Flock*, have turn'd themſelves into ravening *Wolves*, worrying and devouring one another. What Flames, what Confuſions, what Maſſacres, what Devaſtations! have been occaſion'd, by an *over-righteous Zeal*, for that merciful Religion, which diſclaims nothing more than ſuch Unchriſtian Barbarities? And we have too many Inſtances, even at our own doors, in the ſeveral Sects and Diviſions of the Reformation it ſelf, which, if they do not preſent us with any ſuch Tragical Scenes as thoſe beforementioned, yet cannot they be thought

on, without affording a ſad and evident demonſtration, how *poſſible* it is in the *Nature of the thing*, and how *pernicious in its Effects*, for men even in the beſt of Cauſes to be over-righteous. But

How unworthily do men treat the Chriſtian Religion, when they make it the occaſion of ſuch Rage and Animoſity? Chriſtianity was never intended, to kindle ſuch a fiery and paſſionate Zeal amongſt its Votaries. The *Spirit* which that inſpires, is a *Spirit* of mutual Forbearance and Condeſcenſion to one another. A *Spirit*, which for its viſible Repreſentation choſe the Shape of a Dove to appear in, that Emblem of Love, and Meekneſs, and Innocence; a *Spirit* which allows us indeed to join the Serpent's Wiſdom to its Dove-like Innocence, but in all caſes utterly abhors his *Sting* and his *Poyſon*.

'Tis ſuch an amicable *Spirit*, which, as it is the genuine *Fruit*, and the diſtinguiſhing *Badge* of the *Chriſtian Religion*, ſo it is the moſt effectual *Preſerver* of the *Diſciples and Church of Chriſt*. But as for that contrary *Spirit*, of over-much *Zeal* and *Bigotry*, it can tend to nothing, but that fatal end, which the Wiſe man here denounces as the juſt and natural Conſequence of it; namely, That by it we ſhall *deſtroy our ſelves*. For what elſe can be the product of an Intemperate Zeal, and Rigor, and Contention amongſt Chriſtians? It may *pull down*, but it

can

can never *edify*; It can *convert* neither ſide, it may *deſtroy* both.

It is the healing Spirit of Meekneſs and Forbearance, which beſt promotes the Happineſs and Safety, both of *Single men*, and of *Societies*. This has the Bleſſing both of God and Man attending it; *Men* bleſs it, by rendring back a Reciprocal Love and Favour towards it; and *God* bleſſes it by his gracious Promiſes, declaring, *That the* Meek *ſhall inherit the Earth*, the *Meek ſhall find reſt to their Souls*. But on the other hand, a Spirit of fierce *Zeal* and *Bigotry*, ſubverts the Peace and Safety both of private Perſons, and of Communities, and chiefly of thoſe very men who are moſt poſſeſſed and acted by it: For no man can exerciſe a furious Heat and Rigor in oppoſition to *others*, without provoking them, to mete out the ſame Meaſure, back again into his own Boſom. Thus he kindles a Fire, and periſhes himſelf in the ſame Conflagration; the Miſchief which he ſet on foot, comes home to his own door; and he verifies the Wiſeman's Denunciation, which he would not take for his Admonition: By an *Over-righteous* Zeal he *deſtroys himſelf*.

And thus much of the firſt Caution ſuggeſted in my Text: *Be not Righteous Over-much*; that is, Let not thy Zeal for Religion be Immoderate and Furious.

And

And that we may be the better enabled to obſerve this *firſt Caution*, Let us proceed to the *ſecond*, the conſideration of which will moſt effectually conduce to *that end*; for the chief ground and occaſion of ſuch *inordinate Zeal* for *Religion*, ariſes moſt commonly, from an *Over-wiſe and curious ſearch* into the Myſteries of *it*; which is the exceſs forbid by *Solomon* in theſe words: *Make not thy ſelf Over-wiſe*, that is, Let not thy Enquiry into the Knowledge of *Religious Myſteries* be too *Curious* and *Preſumptuous*.

Wiſdom is indeed the Natural deſire and thirſt of our Souls: The Water-Brooks are not ſo fiercely long'd after by the Panting Hart, as this is by the mind of Man; nor when taſted, do they afford ſo great a Refreſhment and Satisfaction. This is that Endowment whereby our Nature exceeds that of the Beaſts that periſh, and imitates, in ſome Meaſure, the Perfection, not only of *Angels*, but even of *God* himſelf. Juſtly therefore may Men's minds Gaſp and Pant after thoſe living Waters; and ſo long as their deſires and endeavours to be wiſe, are Moderate and Humble, they act according to the Prerogative and Propriety of their reaſonable Natures.

But the deſire of Wiſdom is oftentimes too ſtrong, and imperious, to ſubmit to thoſe confinements, which Modeſty and Sobriety would preſcribe

ſcribe to it; for where men's thirſt is ſo great, they are apt to be intemperate in the Gratification of it. They content not themſelves with ſuch *competent Portions* of Knowledge, as God *allows* them, and the Edification of their own Souls *require*; but they Launch out into the boundleſs Ocean of Divine Myſteries, ſtriving to make themſelves *over-wiſe*. They pretend to define the Incomprehenſible Nature and Properties of the Deity; they rifle all the ſecret Cabinets of his Counſels and Providences; they invade the moſt private Receſſes of his inſcrutable Wiſdom, and would leave him no reſerve of Knowledge to himſelf. They deſpiſe the moſt uſeful parts of Religious Wiſdom, as low and vulgar Contemplations; and that Knowledge they account but a poor and contemptible Attainment, which is ſufficient to make 'em ſerviceable in *their Generation*, and to direct them ſafe to *Heaven* hereafter. The *Eyes* of theſe Men's *Underſtandings*, delight not, as the *Eyes of* the *Body* always do, in ſuch Proſpects as are Light, and Clear, and beautifully terminated; but on the contrary, they love, either to be ever looking into ſuch *dark Caverns* and *Abyſſes of Knowledge*, where they can diſcern nothing at all; or elſe to ſurvey ſuch *Infinite Spaces*, where they can never arrive at any end of the Proſpect. Nothing in Religion ſhall be to them a Myſtery.

Has

Has God enacted Eternal and Immutable Decrees? They'l unſeal the Myſtical Book, and the Records of Heaven ſhall not eſcape their obſervation. Has God in a moſt ſtupendious and unſpeakable manner redeem'd Mankind? They muſt unfold the whole Myſtery; and they'll hardly be contented, to accept the benefit of that Redemption, if they may not be allow'd to ſcan, and unravel, the whole Divine Art, by which that glorious Work was Accompliſhed.

With ſuch rude and irreverent Curioſity do men dare to treat the moſt Myſterious Articles of Religion: But this certainly is a moſt preſumptuous exorbitancy, and may juſtly be cenſured as the exceſs forbid by *Solomon* in my Text, it being the making our ſelves over-wiſe. For the *holy Scriptures* ſeem to have drawn a Curtain before theſe Sacred Articles, to admoniſh us not to ſearch too boldly into them; but to receive them, as the conſtant *Trials* of our *Faith*, and *Motives* of our *Humility*. *They* give us the undoubted Teſtimony of God, to aſſert and confirm their truth, and that ſhould be ſufficient to warrant and command our belief of them, which is all that God in this particular, requires at our hands. But if we will be *over-wiſe*, and ſearch too curiouſly after the nature and diſcovery of them, all that we ſhall gain by it, will be nothing elſe but this mournful Recompence,

pence, we ſhall deſtroy our ſelves; for theſe ſublime Truths are placed above our Mortal heads, like the Sun in the Firmament, to the intent that they might warm our Hearts, and influence our Lives; but they will be ſure like the Sun too, to dazle our Eyes, if not to ſtrike us quite blind, if we look too cloſely and obſtinately upon them. It was an aſpiring deſire of being over-wiſe, that brought the Original Curſe and Deſtruction upon Mankind: And alike ill conſequence will attend all thoſe who are guilty of the ſame *Sinful Curioſity* touching *Divine Myſteries*, which was our firſt Parents Tranſgreſſion, in reference to the *Tree of Knowledge*. Such preſumptuous diſcoverers may *loſe* themſelves in their reſearches, as we may ſee by the ſad Ship-wrecks of thoſe, who have been the boldeſt Adventurers that way; but they ſhall never *find* the forbidden ſecrets which they ſo thirſt and languiſh after. They may diſturb their Peace, impair their Health, ſubvert their Faith, diſtract their Reaſon; and according to the Wiſeman's denunciation in my Text, totally deſtroy both their Bodies and Souls; but that's all the fruit that they are likely to reap from their endeavour to make themſelves thus Over-wiſe.

And thus much of the two former Cautions contain'd in my Text, directed to the Good and Religious man.

But if it be ſo neceſſary for the *Good* and *Pious man*, to obſerve ſuch Limits and Cautions in his Applications to *Religion*; How much more then does it behove the *Wicked and Irreligious*, to lay the ſevereſt Reſtraints upon himſelf in Relation to his *Vices*? Which leads me to the Third caution contain'd in my Text: *viz. Be not over-much wicked, neither be thou fooliſh*, That is, Be not Perſiſting and Obdurate in thy Wickedneſs?

The holy Pſalmiſt tells us, that God's *mercies are over all his works*; Extending their Benefits not only to his *good and obedient Creatures*, but alſo to the *wicked and rebellious ones*. He bears long with them, ſpares and cheriſhes them; and when their Sins cry aloud for the Vials of Wrath, he nevertheleſs pours upon them the ſhowers of his Mercy. And what is the gracious end and deſign of this long-forbearance and mercy of God toward them? No other but that which the Apoſtle aſſigns, That he may *thereby lead them to Repentance*: But ſuch is the Ingratitude of Sinners, that it too often works a contrary effect upon them; and that Patience and Long-ſuffering of God, which both in the nature and deſign of it ſhould perſuade them to repent, encourages them to become more exceſſive and obdurate in their Wickedneſs. Thus every days continuance in Sin, as it makes the

Rom. 2. 4.

Sin-

Sinners condition more *dangerous*, ſo it renders him more obdurate and inſenſible of his *danger*; and that wickedneſs which puts him under the greateſt neceſſity of Repentance, does moſt of all diſable and harden him againſt it.

In their firſt Eſſays and Practices of Wickedneſs, Men are naturally apt to be diffident and fearful; full of inward diſtruſts, in the very commiſſion of the evil, and of bitter checks and remorſes for it afterward. They proceed to their firſt acts of Lewdneſs, as raw and unexperienced Soldiers are wont to go into Battel, that is with Chill Fears, Paleneſs and Tremblings; but when they have often try'd the danger, and come off with ſafety, they then bid defiance to the Almighty, *They run upon the thick boſſes of his buckler*; and what they at firſt attempted with ſo much fear and reluctancy, they repeat afterward with Triumph and Shouting. When they find that none of thoſe Judgments, which are denounced againſt Sin, and which they were at firſt ſo apprehenſive of, fall upon their heads; but that on the contrary they are crowned with Bleſſings; they then begin to flatter themſelves, that God's threatnings are but empty Menaces, of much ſeeming terror indeed, but no real danger. That he is no ſuch dreadful Judge and Avenger as they at firſt miſtook him for. And by theſe ſteps they become over-much wicked Job 15. 26.

and fooliſh, that is, hardened and ſecure in their Sins. *Becauſe ſentence is not ſpeedily executed upon them, therefore are their hearts fully ſet in them to do evil.*

Eccl. 8. 11.

But hear the Wiſeman's warning, ye ſecure and obdurate Sinners! Why will ye dye before your time? Miſtake not God's forbearance with you, for an allowance of your actions; think not that you are *Pardon'd* becauſe you are *Reprieved*: Or that God's Judgments againſt you are *reverſed*, becauſe they are reſpited; flatter not your ſelves with ſuch deceitful expectations. For if *Solomon* knew any thing, this will be the *ſure*, tho it may be the *ſlow* Recompence of your over-much Wickedneſs, it will bring you to a wretched and untimely end. For the wrath of God is compared in Scripture to the raging of a Lion; which tho it may be long before it can be provoked, yet it will be ſure to break out upon you at laſt, in ſo much the more violent fury and deſtruction. And admitting that the *Divine Wrath* ſhould for a time paſs you over, yet the natural product of your own over much wickedneſs, will it ſelf do the work of *that Vengeance*, and you will need no other Executioners but your own Vices; for all Sin is naturally of a moſt deadly and peſtilential Influence; it is the fruitful Parent of ſurfeitings, debilities, and rottenneſs of Bones, of an Infirm Life, and an Immature

ture Death. And whilſt both *Nature* and *Providence* thus combine againſt your ſafety, how can you *live out half your days*? How can you eſcape *Solomon*'s Denunciation againſt your over much Wickedneſs, That it ſhall cauſe you to *dye before your time*?

And thus I have given you a brief Illuſtration of the Three Cautions delivered in my Text, and the Arguments annex'd to them by the Wiſe-man. I ſhall now crave leave, only to make Application of what has been ſaid, in a ſhort Addreſs to the Three ſeveral ſorts of Perſons who are guilty of the Exceſſes which we are here warned againſt, and to perſuade them to yield a more dutiful Regard and Obedience to theſe Excellent Cautions of Wiſe *Solomon*.

1. And firſt I ſhall apply my ſelf to the over-much Righteous; that is, to thoſe who are exceſſive and intemperate in their Zeal for Religion.

'Tis one of the ſaddeſt Conſiderations that can enter into a Chriſtian's heart, to obſerve the deplorable effects of ſuch a furious and ungovern'd Zeal in our own Nation; and to reflect upon that Wrath and Bitterneſs, with which men profeſſing the ſame Fundamentals of Religion, do notwithſtanding deteſt and ſeparate from one another. Even the moſt diſtant Parties of men, and moſt diſagreeing in other matters are yet all of the ſame mind

mind in this Point, in ſhowing an immoderate Zeal, in favour to their own Perſuaſions, and in oppoſition to thoſe of other men. Nay, many times you ſhall have ſuch men warmeſt of all for the Cauſe of their Opinions in Religion, who were it not for that Mad and Inordinate Zeal, would be hard put to it to produce from their whole Life and Practice any other Proof that they are of any Religion at all. Let the Members of the Party that is oppoſite to them be never ſo regular both in Belief and Practice; never ſo careful to preſerve Faith, and a good Conſcience; yet becauſe they dare to contradict them in ſome ſmall things, they burn with Zeal againſt them; give no Quarter either to their Perſons or Opinions; but that ſingle and inconſiderable difference ſhall efface all ſenſe of their Agreement in greater matters; and like a Gulph fix'd between them, ſhall ſeparate them from all Chriſtian Charity and Commerce with one another. Unreaſonable men! Thus to rip up the very Bowels of Chriſtianity by an over-righteous Zeal for its Cauſe, and for the ſake of ſuch things which are but the *Mint*, and *Anniſe*, and *Cummin* of Religion, to violate that Love and Meekneſs which are the *weightier things of our* Saviour's Law.

But all ſuch fierce and extravagant Zealots, of whatever Tribe or Perſuaſion, let me admoniſh,

That

That the Goſpel abhors ſuch a Furious and Uncharitable Bigotry, and enjoins us to *let our moderation be known unto all men.* It commands us indeed to ſhow a *Zeal towards God*: But what kind of *Zeal* is it? Is it ſuch a blind, angry, and exterminating Zeal, as that which theſe men are poſſeſſed with? Nothing more contrary; It is a Zeal *according to knowledge*; a Zeal that enlightens, warms and cheriſhes, but never conſumes or deſtroys. A Zeal that ought indeed to ſtir us up to *convince gainſayers*, and to *put to ſilence the ignorance of fooliſh men*: But how ſhould that be done? Not with fierce Oppoſitions, Fury, and Maliciouſneſs; but by the gentler methods of *Love*, and *Patience*, and *Well-doing*: *Theſe are the Weapons of our Warfare.* A Chriſtian Zeal muſt imitate that friendly and propitious River upon which this City ſtands, and to which you are ſo much indebted for your Traffick and Grandeur: It muſt proceed in a ſtill and gentle Courſe, and not in ſuch an eager and rapid Torrent, as can ſerve only to ſweep all things before it, and to betray the ſhallowneſs of its own Channel. From the example of this Bountiful River, be pleaſed to learn the due Moderation of your Piety: And derive this double Advantage from its Waters, to make it the Patern of your Zeal, as it is the great Fountain of your Riches. 'Tis ſuch a Calm, and Even, and Deep Current of Religion, which alone

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can quench the burning Diſcords that are between us; and Import as great an Increaſe of true Piety amongſt us, as that other does of Wealth and Splendor.

And have we not now, in the preſent Poſture of our Affairs, the greateſt reaſon to be of this mind, conſidering the Subtilty and Vigilance of our Common Enemies, who will be ſure to take all Advantages from our Domeſtick Feuds, and to improve them to their *Intereſt*, and our *Deſtruction*. How will they *rejoice in Gath*, and *triumph in the ſtreets of Askalon*! to ſee our over-righteous Zeal againſt each other; to look on whilſt we moſt unnaturally do the work of their *Arms* by our own *Animoſities*; and give them the Pleaſure of beholding our Ruin, without putting them to the Trouble and Expence of procuring it? Let me beſeech you therefore, for the ſake of our Common Intereſt and Safety, to entertain Candid, Amicable, Chriſtian Diſpoſitions towards one another. And whereever we meet with a man of a truly Pious and Teachable Spirit; Sound and Orthodox in the Articles of the Chriſtian Faith, and conſcientiouſly obſervant of the Rules of Chriſtian Practice; let us treat ſuch a one as a Brother, and a true Diſciple of Jeſus Chriſt. We may wiſh indeed, That he were *not only almoſt*, but *altogether ſuch as we are*: We may, by the proper methods of Gentleneſs, Good Example,

Example, and Meek perſuaſion, endeavour to make him ſo. But if that perfect conſent cannot be obtain'd, if thoſe leſſer marks of diſtinction cannot be totally wiped out; yet let 'em not be allow'd to break Friendſhip between us, and to prejudice our Charity: but when we are ſo far agreed Let us over-look in our private Capacities and common Converſation, all differences in leſſer matters; and ſay of 'em all, as *Ephron* did to *Abraham*, concerning the price of his Field, *What is that betwixt me and thee?* This is the true Genius and Behaviour of a Chriſtian Spirit; and to this I exhort you all, in the name of God, and in the *meekneſs and gentleneſs of Jeſus Chriſt*, by whoſe name we are call'd, and whoſe merciful temper, ought to be made the ſubject of our faithful imitation. But if the Example of Chriſt be not ſufficient to work us into ſuch a mild and condeſcending Spirit, yet at leaſt let the ſenſe and care of our own Self-Preſervation prevail with us; for why ſhould we by an *over-Righteous Zeal* and Bigotry *deſtroy our ſelves*?

But 2. In the next place let me addreſs my ſelf to thoſe who tranſgreſs in the ſecond exceſs, caution'd againſt in my Text, By *making themſelves over-wiſe*; that is, by being too boldly Curious and Inquiſitive in the Myſteries of Religion.

This is an Exceſs, the practice and miſchief of which is too widely and fatally ſpread in the preſent Age. In which, the moſt Venerable Myſteries of Religion, are proſtituted to the moſt illiterate and vulgar Examination; and thoſe ſacred Articles of the Trinity and Incarnation, to which the moſt Improved Underſtandings of former Ages have bow'd with a profound Veneration, are preſumptouſly attempted to be unfolded, by every confident Undertaker; and if they cannot be *unfolded*, more preſumptuouſly *deni'd*, as if it were out of Malice and Revenge for their unſearchable obſcurity.

But let every ſuch curious and daring Enquirer hear the Advice of the Wiſeman, who is likely to be his beſt In-

ſtructor in the rules and meaſures of acquiring Knowledge; *Make not thy ſelf over-wiſe.*

Vain Man! Wouldeſt thou be wiſe beyond the Standard and Capacity of thy Nature? Does this diſoblige thee, that there ſhould be Myſteries in Religion above thy Underſtanding? Will nothing content thee but thou muſt comprehend the Eſſence and Attributes of the Deity? Fooliſh and Ambitious Creature! Go firſt and ſtudy thoſe things which are more proportion'd to thy capacity; the Idioms and Elegancies of Languages, the Hiſtories and Polities of Nations, the Practical Maxims and Caſes of Morality, and the ordinary appearances of Nature. Search into the matter and motions of the heavenly Bodies, the Formation of Animals, the Virtues of Plants, the ſeeds and mixtures of Earth, and the fluxes and refluxes of the Waters. And when thou haſt gone through this School of Art and Nature, and haſt maſtered all the difficulties that occur there; then, and not before, begin to unriddle the Myſterious Doctrines concerning Religion, and the Author of Nature. But if there are many things even in this inferior ſcope of Knowledge, which thou muſt confeſs to be too hard for all thy Study and Learning to overcome, and which will baffle thy moſt diligent enquiry into them; Why ſhouldeſt thou pretend too boldly to the Knowledge of more remote and ſublime things? Why ſhouldeſt thou think it a diſparagement to thy underſtanding, which is not able to give account of the meaneſt Plant or Inſect, to acknowledge ſomething above its comprehenſion, in the *Nature of God*, and the *Myſteries of Religion*?

Let me therefore as earneſtly, as I may ſeaſonably in this Generation, Exhort you all, in conſideration of the narrowneſs and inſufficiency of our human underſtandings, not to be too curious, or to expect to be over wiſe in Religious Myſteries; but let us acquieſce in ſuch a knowledge and diſcovery of thoſe high and inacceſſible Articles, as

as may conduce to our Edification and Salvation; and let us not by an endeavour to be *over-wiſe* in them, weary, and diſtract, and perplex our minds; For why ſhould we thus *deſtroy our ſelves*?

But 3. Let me now apply my ſelf to thoſe who are guilty of the laſt and greateſt exceſs forbidden in my Text, who are, the *over-much wicked* and *obdurate Sinners*.

And all ſuch let me exhort, by the terror of the Wiſe-man's denunciation, to rouze themſelves up from their dangerous ſecurity. 'Tis a Lethargick and treacherous ſleep, that lulls them ſo faſt, and will be ſure to end in an Immature, and which is worſe, in an Eternal death; and what Motive can be ſufficient to perſuade men to the forſaking of their moſt beloved Vices, if they will not do it for this ſtrong reaſon, for the prolongation of their Lives, and for the eſcaping of Death?

What terrible pains and operations, will not men ſometimes contentedly undergo for theſe dear ends? they'l part with Limb after Limb, cut off Right-hands, pluck out Right-eyes, and think themſelves ſufficiently rewarded for all, if they can but avoid dying thereby, and preſerve a poor helpleſs trunk and remnant of Life. And why will they not be equally prevailed with for the ſame reaſon, to give up their Sins? Thoſe Sins which are the Gangreens and Mortifications of their Bodies and Souls, and muſt, if not cut off, bring them to death before their time? Why will they not part with *theſe Right-hands*, *and theſe Right-eyes*, their beloved Sins, as willingly as they do thoſe of their Bodies, ſince there would be leſs pain in doing it, and there is for it a greater neceſſity. Strange and unaccountable infatuation! That whereas *Skin for Skin, and all that a man hath will he give for his life*; yet he will not, tho for the ſake of the ſame dear poſſeſſion, be perſuaded to part with his darling Vices.

What account canſt thou give of ſuch a proceeding, thou

ſooliſh and obdurate Sinner? That whereas God has *hedged in thy way with thorns*, and placed death as a ſtop in thy progreſs, thou wilt yet break through all thoſe ſtrong fences, chuſing to dye before thy time, and to offer thy ſelf up, if I may ſo ſay, a Martyr to the Devil? What Apology canſt thou make for ſuch an extravagant conduct? What reaſon canſt thou find wherewith to anſwer the Wiſemans queſtion, why thou wilt dye before thy time? Is death ſo amiable a thing in thy eyes? Art thou ſo enamour'd with the *King of terrors*, that thou haſteneſt thus to meet him, and to anticipate the day of thy diſſolution? No certainly, this cannot be the true reaſon of thy proceeding; no man can be thus in love with death, but eſpecially not the wicked man, who muſt expect ſo ſad a Cataſtrophe after death. But the true cauſe of ſuch an abſurd Behaviour is this; That men conſider not the laſt iſſue of their actions: they go on in their Vices, as *the Ox goes to the Slaughter*, reflecting in the mean time no more than that Beaſt does, that they are tending to the Chambers of death. Awake then, ye harden'd and ſecure Sinners, from this unthinking ſtupidity! Ariſe, and *eſcape for your Lives*! Death and Hell are before you, and why will ye die before your time? *If you love life, and deſire to ſee good days*, flee from thoſe Vices which lead you into ſuch fatal and murderous conſequences; Let the *time paſt of your lives be* accounted as *over-much wickedneſs*; and walk from henceforth in the good and wholeſome Paths of Virtue and Religion. Thus will you eſcape that untimely end which the Wiſeman here warns you of; thus will you ſet out in a *fair way* to a *long life* here, and in a *ſure way to* an *eternal One* hereafter. *To which God of his Infinite Mercy bring us all through Jeſus Chriſt*, To whom, *&c.*

F I N I S.